

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 VIENNA 01740 231439Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----130946 240216Z /75
R 231421Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5283

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 01740

EXDIS

E.O. 11652:GDS
TAGS: PINT, UR, AU
SUBJECT: KREISKY ON HEALTH OF BREZHNEV AND STATE OF
SOVIET LEADERSHIP

REF: A) VIENNA 01734, B) MOSCOW 2055, C) COPENHAGEN 1022

1. I CALLED ON CHANCELLOR KREISKY ON FEBRUARY 17 TO GET HIS VIEWS ON RESULTS OF HIS RECENT WORKING TRIP TO MOSCOW (REFTEL A). IN COURSE OF OUR DISCUSSION, KREISKY NOTED THAT HE HAD LENGTHY (90 MINUTES) PRIVATE MEETING WITH BREZHNEV AT WHICH ONLY TWO INTERPRETERS WERE PRESENT. KREISKY OFFERED ME SOME PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS REGARDING BREZHNEV'S HEALTH, AND VOLUNTEERED HIS OWN VIEWS ON CURRENT STATE OF SOVIET LEADERSHIP. HE ASKED THAT THIS INFORMATION BE GIVEN VERY LIMITED DISTRIBUTION WITHIN USG CIRCLES AND HE BE STRICTLY PROTECTED AS SOURCE SINCE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE WOULD MAKE RELATIVELY EASY HIS IDENTIFICATION AS SOURCE OF INFORMATION. KREISKY'S OBSERVATIONS FOLLOW.

2. BREZHNEV'S HEALTH: BREZHNEV GAVE IMPRESSION OF BEING TIRED, VERY OLD MAN ALSO SUFFERING FROM WHAT SEEMED TO BE AFTEREFFECTS OF HIS RECENT BOUT WITH FLU. BREZHNEV, WHO WAS ACCOMPANIED BY VERY NERVOUS INTERPRETER ASSISTANT, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 VIENNA 01740 231439Z

READ FROM PREPARED TEXTS THE SOVIET POSITIONS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS UNDER DISCUSSION. BEFORE RESPONDING TO KREISKY'S QUERIES, BREZHNEV AT TIMES CONSULTED WITH INTERPRETER ASSISTANT TO BE ASSURED HIS PLANNED RESPONSES WERE CORRECT. KREISKY COMMENTED THAT THIS IS NOT THE DEMEANOR OF A MAN IN CONTROL OF A POWERFUL COUNTRY.

3. CURRENT STATE OF SOVIET LEADERSHIP: FOREGOING SITUATION PROMPTED KREISKY TO GIVE ME HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT STATE OF SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND POSSIBLE COURSE OF SHORT-TERM DEVELOPMENTS. HE SAID HIS LINE OF ANALYSIS, WHICH FOLLOWS, IS BASED ON HIS OWN OBSERVATIONS AND ON INFORMATION FROM WHAT HE TERMED WELL-INFORMED SOURCES.

A) BREZHNEV IS NOT IN CHARGE AND IS NOT EFFECTIVE TOP SOVIET LEADER. HOWEVER, UNEASY POLITBURO MEMBERSHIP PREFERS TO HAVE BREZHNEV PLAY THIS ROLE RATHER THAN HAVE POLITBURO BECOME VENUE OF ACTIVE STRUGGLE OVER SUCCESSORSHIP AT THIS TIME.

B) TOP SOVIET LEADERSHIP IS IN HANDS OF POLITBURO MEMBERSHIP CONSISTING OF OLD MEN WHO ABHOR CHANGE OF ANY KIND. NO ONE IN POLITBURO IS PUSHING HARD TO REPLACE OR SUCCEED BREZHNEV AT THIS TIME LEST HE BECOME TARGET FOR COUNTERACTION BY OTHERS.

C) POLITBURO MEMBERS ARE WARY OF LEADERSHIP OF STATE SECURITY FORCES AND POSSIBLY ONE OR MORE AMBITIOUS POLITICAL MARSHALS. EFFORT IS THEREFORE UNDERWAY TO ASSOCIATE MILITARY LEADERSHIP MORE CLOSELY WITH POLITBURO AND TO USE SAME AS COUNTER-BALANCING FORCE IN RESERVE AGAINST POTENTIAL CHALLENGERS.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 VIENNA 01740 231439Z

D) SUSLOV'S STANDING VIS-A-VIS BREZHNEV HAS BEEN RAISED, BUT THIS GROWTH IN PRESTIGE HAS BEEN ON BASIS OF CASTING SUSLOV AS BREZHNEV SUPPORTER RATHER THAN AS A SUCCESSOR. THIS SUGGESTS, ACCORDING TO KREISKY, THAT SUSLOV HIMSELF IS UNLIKELY CANDIDATE TO BREZHNEV SUCCESSORSHIP BUT IS MORE LIKELY TO BE TAPPED AS PERSON TO PUT FORWARD AT APPROPRIATE TIME NAME OF SUCCESSOR TO BREZHNEV.

E) IN KREISKY'S VIEW, GROMYKO HAS GOOD POSSIBILITY OF BEING NAMED NOMINAL SUCCESSOR TO BREZHNEV. FOR THE SHORT-TERM, SUCH A MOVE WOULD PUT INTO KEY POSITION A COMPROMISE CANDIDATE WHO IS WELL KNOWN TO ALL MEMBERS OF POLITBURO, HAS HIMSELF ONLY LIMITED POWER AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE MAJOR THREAT TO ANY MEMBERS OF POLITBURO.

4. COMMENT: WE ASSUME MAJOR DISPARITY BETWEEN COMMENTS ON BREZHNEV'S HEALTH ATTRIBUTED TO KREISKY IN REFTEL B ("NOTHING UNUSUAL") AND IN REFTEL C (SHOCKING, SUGGESTING BREZHNEV NEAR END) REFLECTS KREISKY'S DESIRE TO AVOID BECOME IDENTIFIED BY SOVIETS AS SOURCE OF POSSIBLE DISTURBING REPORT MAKING ROUNDS IN MOSCOW ON BREZHNEV'S

HEALTH. WOLF

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HEALTH, MINISTERIAL VISITS, POLITICAL LEADERS, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978VIENNA01740
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780085-0269
Format: TEL
From: VIENNA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780219/aaaaaqha.tel
Line Count: 117
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: cddfdad0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 VIENNA 1734, 78 MOSCOW 2055, 78 COPENHAGEN 1022
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3495217
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KREISKY ON HEALTH OF BREZHNEV AND STATE OF SOVIET LEADERSHIP
TAGS: PINT, UR, AU, (KREISKY, BRUNO), (BREZHNEV, LEONID I)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/cddfdad0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014